

General John T. Chain, Jr. (Ret)
Keynote Speech
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. And General Wilson, thank you very much for the warm introduction. It's a privilege and a pleasure for me to be here today. I've learned many lessons in my 35 years in our Air Force and my 23 years now in the business world. I chose eight of those lessons to share with you this morning.

Number one, risk/reward. Number two, talent and visibility. Number three, separate yourself from the crowd. Four, what does the boss need to know? Five, know what you know and don't know and some way fill the void. Six, personal integrity. Seven, learn to work with diversified teams. Eight, and above all, do what's right and you always know what's right.

1952 when I started college at Denison University in Ohio the Korean War was going on. My freshman year at Denison they started an Air Force ROTC program, and since I didn't want to be drafted I enrolled in ROTC. Not out of the goodness of my heart.

At graduation I was commissioned as a second lieutenant, and having qualified for pilot training I went off to Texas with my new bride, Judy -- who is still with me by the way -- to enter the Air Force, finishing pilot training. I qualified for fighter pilot training and with graduation I was assigned to a fighter squadron in Toul-Rosières, France. Some of you may have been there. It's on the eastern side of France [inaudible], rather a [public] location.

After I was there for two years our squadron intelligence officer, Captain Roby, was reassigned and his replacement wasn't going to be there for a number of months. So I went to see the squadron commander and told him I wanted to be the intelligence officer. He told me in no uncertain terms I was the squadron's top gun and that was a full-time job and he wasn't going to let me do the job of intelligence officer also. I told him I wanted to continue to be a fighter pilot and pull alert and I wanted to be the intelligence officer.

The next day he called me in and told me Chain, you're going to be the intelligence officer and continue to pull alert and don't screw up. Guidance I could understand.

I did the two jobs successfully and was duly rewarded. I didn't realize that at the time, but looking back I realized that I'd learned three lessons. One -- separate yourself from the crowd. Which I did. Two, talent with visibility, which is a risk. Having talent without visibility won't do you any good. And having visibility without talent will kill you. Third, risk/reward. After four years in Europe I asked my wife Judy if I could have just one more assignment and I promised I'd get out and go to law school. She reluctantly agreed and we were assigned to Clovis, New Mexico, still flying the F-100.

Shortly after we got there, the Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded and our squadron was deployed to MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. I was to lead a four-ship flight to attack a missile site in Cuba. Every day we were awakened at 0430, pre-flighted our airplane, got an intelligence briefing, had

breakfast, and waited and waited and waited to go to war. It drug on for a few weeks, and later we were able to take a few airplanes off of alert and do some flying. The deployment lasted for several months, and you know the outcome.

A year and a half later I was told a division general, General [Shintz], some of you older gentlemen probably remember General [Shintz], wanted to see me. So I went up to his office and he told me that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Army wanted to have better relations. So the Army was to send a ground liaison officer to each fighter wing and the Air Force was to send two forward air controllers to each Army division. He then told me he wanted me to volunteer. I told him I would if I could go with an Army Air Corps Division because they were paratroopers and were all volunteers and were therefore our best soldiers. Then general worked the issue and I went on to Fort Benning to go through Army paratrooper training which is a story unto itself and I won't bore you with it.

After the training I was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The Army was much more rigid than the Air Force. I had an Army captain ask me for my date of rank so he could determine whether he should call me sir, or I should call him sir.

I quickly learned how to adapt to the Army standards and way of doing business. I had to fit in. It was their area. I decided that I had to have the sharpest uniform, the shiniest boots, the closest haircut and always be the first one to any activity. And they allowed me to check out in the Army 01, a little propeller-driven airplane, and I used that around the area, and then I made an agreement with the people at the Air Guard base up in Illinois. We had a lieutenant colonel who I had met in the 417th Fighter Wing before they retired it, and he was flying with them. I called him and told him I wanted to fly the F-84 for him and he [inaudible]. He called me a couple of days later and said I talked to the people in charge and they said as long as you do it during the week when the Guard isn't doing very much, come on up and fly. So I did that for the time I was with the Army also.

I decided even though I was drawing jump pay that I needed more jumps than the Army counterparts, which I did. When I left Fort Campbell a year and a half later, I had made 66 jumps as an Army paratrooper and became a jump master and was awarded my Master Parachute Badge by the commander and general before I left Fort Campbell.

The lesson I learned was that being with a diverse team I had to participate to the maximum to demonstrate my support for and understanding of their mission. The quid pro quo for volunteering to be a forward air controller was the assignment of my choice when it was over. The Vietnam War was just cranking up so I requested and volunteered to go to Vietnam and fly the A-1 Sky Raiders. Right then we were training people to fly the A-1 down at Hurlburt in Florida, so I took my little O-1 and flew down to Florida and I had a friend there who had been in the 417th with me before, he was an instructor. He had a two-seat version of the A-1 and he put me in the right seat and I got proficient with it.

Then when I went to Vietnam, when I got there I told them with a stretch of imagination that I was already checked out in the A-1. So my first flight flying in the Air Force, I went into an A-1 with the Vietnamese Air Force and they put me in the cockpit in the pilot seat -- it was a two place up front - - and the instructor pilot in the right seat. So I cranked up the airplane, because when I was down in Hurlburt I found out how you started it. After we started, halfway out they've got a tail [wheel] and it wouldn't turn. I said this airplane won't turn, and he reached over and eliminated the lever which had a lock [inaudible]. Oh, yeah. I forgot that. So I taxi'd out and unlocked it. Got to the end of the runway, there were two other airplanes flying with me and my pilot, and we took off. [Inaudible] bombs, went over to an area, flew over a little town, and came back and landed, came in, got signed off for my in-country checkout. Never had another evaluation the whole time I was there for the year.

Anyway, the quid pro quo for volunteering to be a forward air controller was the assignment of my choice when it was over, and once we finished that up, I went to the Pentagon. My general boss said you've been flying so much you've got to go do something else. I had come out on the major's list. So he sent me to the Pentagon in the Office of NATO European Affairs. Things I knew absolutely nothing about.

Shortly after arriving in the Pentagon I was asked to brief the Chief of Staff of the Air Force on the new reorganization of NATO's headquarters. I had no idea what the Chief knew about that so I looked up his biography and found out he had never been assigned to NATO. So I studied up NATO and built a simple Dick and Jane briefing -- I think you know what I mean -- and then briefed the Chief and the senior staff on the reorganization.

About a week later I received a letter through the channels from the Chief saying that I would now be his primary briefer. Lesson learned, bud. If I was the boss what would I need to know? And then for me to give it to him.

Later I was selected for promotion to lieutenant colonel and was asked to go on exchange duty with the Department of State in the Office of Political Military Affairs -- another diverse team opportunity.

So I went to Brooks Brothers and bought some suits, shirts and ties and reported to the State Department. Their culture was much different than ours. Most of the people in State ran on a first-name basis. They started their day later than I was used to, but they were very comfortable being there in the evening. They had excellent academic credentials. Most of them spoke at least one additional language and many of them more than one. They all looked forward to the embassy assignments, they all treated me as one of their own and I developed many close friends.

A year later I was selected to go to the National War College and while there I was promoted to colonel at a little over 14 years in service. After graduation I was assigned to the fighter wing, Tucson, Arizona as the Assistant Deputy for Operations flying a brand new [A-7] [inaudible]. Six months later the commander called me in and told me our colonel in charge of maintenance and

supply was being reassigned and he had to leave the next day and that I was to replace him and be in charge of maintenance and supply. I told him, Boss, I don't even know how to spell monkey wrench. And he said, you have until tomorrow morning to learn. Another diverse team opportunity.

The next morning in my new office I asked the sergeant major who was the brightest sergeant in supply and who was the brightest sergeant in maintenance. He quickly answered, Sergeant Gilly in maintenance and Sergeant Hernandez in supply. I told him, please get them up to my office immediately. When they showed up I told them I knew nothing about maintenance nor supply and pointing to the eagles on my shoulder I told them I have the brawn and you two guys have the brains and together we can turn this place into a showcase. With all modesty, we did.

The lesson I learned was, know what you know, don't know, and some way fill the void.

Six months later I volunteered to go back to Vietnam for a year as the head of operations for the largest fighter wing we had flying missions over North Vietnam. It was a very good fighting year for me, leading combat missions in F-4s over [inaudible]. I did that for six months when our son had a major back operation. I flew back to the States to be with my wife and son. After a week, I flew back to [inaudible]. When I landed my exec met me and told me the wing commander wanted to see me as soon as I landed. So he drove me up to the boss' office. I went in, we met, and he told me in my five-day absence the PACAF IG had inspected. The operation came out with an A+ and the rest of the wing and logistics failed completely. He told me I was still head of operations, but now I was also head of logistics. I called PACAF headquarters and told them you've got to find Sergeants Hernandez and Gilly right now to get over here. Four days later the two guys showed up. Boss, what are we doing here? I said we're going to fix this place, and we did.

With all modesty, we turned maintenance and supply into a showcase. How we did it was a quick evaluation. The first night at 1800 all officers and men in supply had to report to a very large room with lots of chairs and I told them, everyone in maintenance and supply who had a "due in for maintenance", a DIFM, would have to explain why to me tonight and we would start with the guy who had the most. The person that only has one has to wait until the end. And we started. We had to flags to show, the time that we did it, where we ended up getting, in five days we ended up wiping those things all out. The first night, which we started at 6:00 o'clock and finished at 3:00 in the morning, the guys with the one DIFM had been sitting there all that time. I assured him [inaudible] a backup again. But anyway, it worked like a charm.

The headquarters did not believe my report that we'd done it in five days. So they called me and said we're going to send out an evaluation team and see what we were doing out there and whether we were cheating. They came out and looked around and checked everything and said that they didn't find anything wrong, and what they were doing was sending maintenance and flying [inaudible] over and we welcomed them and they did it. And I continued to fly combat missions. Since I was also the head of operations, I had a great year.

Returning to the States I had the privilege of serving in two additional fighter wings. One at George Air Force Base in California for a year flying the F-4; and then vice commander at Nellis flying as an instructor, I was the flight commander, but flying as an instructor with the aggressor squadron for another year. I didn't do any school room teaching for the aggressors, but I briefed and debriefed flights on what they could and should do in a dogfight. I [whipped] them and debriefed them on what their errors were in flight and tell me that I wasn't enjoying myself.

After a year at Nellis I was assigned to the headquarters of Tactical Air Command as head of fighter operations which is a stateside fighter command. After a year I was told the four star General Robert J. Dixon wanted me to be his special assistant. I said is somebody going to brief me or tell me about this? They said no, no in-brief except for his secretary to tell me -- I went to see the secretary who told me they have an office for me down the hall with a secretary for me, new filing cabinets which were empty, and that my seat in the conference room was a chair to the general's left against the wall. I then asked her if General Dixon would like to tell me anything. She said no.

I never was told anything. I needed to listen and deduce what he might want.

One time the secretary called me and told me that the new Secretary of the Air Force was coming to visit and General Dixon wanted me to prepare a briefing for General Dixon to give to the new Secretary. I said does General Dixon want to share with me any of his thoughts that he wants to talk about? She said no.

So two nights later about 8:00 p.m. we met in a briefing room to go over the briefing that I had built for him. We had a chart flipper in the room behind us. When the general sat down, I said first chart, Jimmy. And we started going through the charts without me saying anything. Thirty minutes later a chart came up and the general said that doesn't track. Go back one, Jimmy. He said to me -- See, that doesn't track. I kept my mouth shut. The general was kind of looking at me. So I yelled at the booth, Jimmy, go back two. He went back two. And I said first chart, and he puts it up and I said one, two and three. Next chart. It comes up and I said that's four, five and six. And I turned to General Dixon and said see, it does track. The general got up, we were in the conference room. He paced the room for it seemed like an eternity, but then he went and leaned over the table and said you're right, it does track. I apologize. And I said, in my finite lack of wisdom, you don't need to apologize to me, general. Which led to oh, the colonel doesn't accept the general's apology. It was a long night. [Laughter].

Four hundred years later he gave me command of the 1st Tac Fighter Wing, the first unit to get the brand new, wonderful

F-15. A year later I was promoted to one star and told that the Secretary of the Air Force, John Stetson wanted to see me. I went to the Pentagon, met with him, and he told me that he wanted me to be his military assistant. And I said no, thank you. I'm a general. I'm flying the F-15. I don't want to give all that up. He said well, can we talk about it? Two hours later I said, deep down I know I'm not going to be able to stay in the cockpit and I can't think of a more interesting position

to have than being your military assistant. So if you really want me, my answer is yes. He said yes, I do want you and we leave for India on Friday. Get ready. Which we did.

I learned a lot from Mr. Stetson, and when he left the Air Force we remained very close friends. Years later when I retired from the Air Force, one of my first calls was from him asking me to go on the Kemper Board of Directors in Chicago, which I did.

Two years later I was promoted to two stars and made head of the Air Force Operations; after two years I was promoted to three stars and made head of Plans and Operations. In my second year in the job I was told the Air Force Chief of Staff, that the head of the National Guard Bureau was retiring and the Army and Air Force were going to compete for the position. There would be a scheduled selection board appointed -- two Air Force generals, two Army generals -- and that I would be the fifth member as the president of the board. I was also told that the White House wanted the Air Force nominee selected, as did the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. I replied no problem, Chief. I know John very well, he would make a great leader of the Guard.

The Board met and we went through the records of the two nominees -- both excellent officers. We voted. And then I went back to debrief the Chief. When I entered the office I told him the board had met, the Army generals voted for the Army nominee, the Air Force generals voted for the Air Force nominee. I then told him the Army nominee had by far the superior record and that despite what I had been told, I voted for the Army nominee. And if I didn't, right now Chief, I would be handing you my resignation from the Air Force because I would have compromised my personal integrity.

Predictably there were repercussions, but I reinforced my belief in the previous lessons learned. Personal integrity and do what's right, and you always know what's right.

A year later the Secretary of State, George Shultz interviewed me and asked me to come to the State Department and be in charge of the Bureau of Political Military Affairs. Assistant Secretary of State position. Another diverse team opportunity. I had had a previous assignment with the State Department. I knew a lot of the senior players and how the departments functioned, and it was quickly recognized that I was on the first team and had a warm personal relationship with Secretary of State George Shultz who is a great guy and very very brilliant.

We got along splendidly. People behind our backs, I hate to share it with you, used to behind our backs refer to us as Batman and Robin, flying around the world, White House meetings with the President in the Oval Office once a week, and also in the White House situation room. It was a wonderful assignment. We cut a wide swath in Washington. Played golf regularly. I loved my job.

A year later the Joint Chiefs of Staff nominated me for four stars to become Chief of Staff of NATO military headquarters in Mons, Belgium. It took three months before Secretary Shultz would agree to let me go, and I stayed out of the discussion, I guarantee you.

NATO headquarters was another diverse team experience. Every one assigned there was to have their loyalty to NATO. However, some either had been instructed or ordered by their country to take their country first.

At one staff meeting a German Army two star who was leaning on me rather hard -- I was leaning on rather hard -- told me that if he didn't know I was such a good shot, he would challenge me to a duel. He returned to Germany very quickly.

NATO was an assignment that Judy and I thoroughly enjoyed. After a year at NATO, I was brought back to become Commander in Chief of the Strategic Air Command. As you know, the mission was awesome and continues to be awesome. We have 52 bases around the world. We have diversified weapon systems -- bombers, refueling aircraft, ICBMs, and most importantly wonderful people. We had troops on alert 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They were proud of their mission and executed extremely well. We all recognized the seriousness of our business and dealing with nuclear weapons. My standard was dealing with nukes anything less than perfect was unsatisfactory. I can assure you that leading a top notch military organization full of pride was not a difficult assignment. It was filled with daily rewards. I had the privilege of being a commander for almost five years before I had reached my mandatory 35 years of time in service.

When I retired from the Air Force I had five job opportunities and took the position of Executive Vice President for Operations of Burlington Northern Railroad in Fort Worth, Texas. I had a five year contract. My first day in my new civilian job I went to my office early, prepared for the chairman's weekly staff meeting. I showed up early to the conference room. Other members drifted in. The meeting was scheduled to start at 9:00 o'clock. At 9:10 I got up and said I have important things to do, somebody please call me when the chairman shows up. Twenty minutes later I got a call and went back to the board meeting. The meeting lasted until almost noon. The chairman pushed back his chair and said great meeting, guys, let's go have some lunch. I looked at my notepad and noted it was empty. No writing on it at all. I slapped the table and said just a minute. What did we decide? Who's going to do what? And when are they going to have it done? Then there was silence in the room. And then it dawned on me. I am not at the head of the table. It was not my meeting. I was not used to spending three hours on something that did not have a conclusion and an assignment.

The chairman pushed back and said Jack's right. What did we decide? Who's going to do what?

I went home that night and my wife Judy said, how was your day, dear? To which I replied, honey, this is going to be a long five years, and it was.

However, while at Burlington Northern I was invited to go on some important boards. Burlington Northern, I was already on the Burlington Northern board. The chairman there encouraged me to do it because I would broaden my business experience. I soon was contacted by a number of other corporate boards -- ConAgra Foods, RJR Nabisco, Reynolds American, Thomas Group, Kemper

Insurance, [Baron] Partners. Being on those boards I recognized the value in lead directors and non-executive chairmen. I talked to Harvard Business School about starting a lead director, non-executive chairman program, which they did.

It was an outstanding mixed career. I learned a heck of a lot. I would love to still be in the business world but in about a week and a half I turn 80, so I think it's a cutoff in age. There are things to do for your wife. But I really did enjoy the business world and hope to be able to do pro bono work, without taking any money for it.

Today it's just been wonderful to be with all you guys and gals and be able to celebrate your successes. So thank you very much for inviting me. If anybody has any comments or questions, I'm sure they're going to give me the hook whenever they want, so if anybody has any questions I'll be happy to try to answer them.

[Applause]

Question: General, Captain Russell, [inaudible] staff A4.

I just wanted to ask you, what was your most memorable experience serving throughout the world, staff, officer, through the ranks all over, as attaché?

General (Ret) Chain: Can you say it again?

Question: Your most memorable experience serving all over the world. Flying, logistics, anything. Your most memorable experience.

General (Ret) Chain: Did I enjoy doing it? Oh, in the Air Force? Every time we were where we were, we said this is the best place we've ever been. We got another assignment, another assignment. Each time when we walked through the first door, Judge and I both said this is the best place we've ever been. It doesn't matter what it was, we just said wherever we are, the people we're going to be with, they have to be top notch, period. We never evaluated one against another.

Question: What I heard you talk about was in all your experiences was leading from the front. You set that example. Can you talk briefly about the importance of doing that? And who talked to the young airmen? First on accountability, but basically leading from the front in all your assignments. It sounds like you did just that.

General (Ret) Chain: I agree. I think it's a major issue. A lot of people I met through the 35 years hid in their office, did some good work, had an in-basket, out-basket, what have you, that weren't impacting on people that could learn from them, or that they could learn from the other people, in the group of people. Any leader that doesn't take the opportunity to share views with I'll call them the troops -- male, female, doesn't matter what they are -- that they won't share and get feedback they're wasting a lot of valuable time in our service.

Question: [Inaudible]?

General (Ret) Chain: I did. I had never been with him when he was on active duty, but when I took over the Strategic Air Command the first phone call I made, after the little ceremony, went to the office, told my secretary, get General LeMay on the phone. He was out in California. I said I just took over your command and I'm going to fly out in the next five days to see you. What day would you want me there? There's a pause. Anyway, [inaudible]. So I flew out there. When I got there Helen, his wife, met me at the door, took me into his office, and we shook hands, what have you, and I said General, I'm brand new in SAC, never been in SAC, you're the godfather of SAC, here's your new student. You can start wherever you want, but I want to pick your brain until 4:00 o'clock this afternoon.

Also he had hearing aids, which was interesting. But anyway, so we started talking. Then Helen comes in the room. As soon as she comes in the room he reaches out, [inaudible], and I'm looking at him. Geez, Judy would kill me if I did that. [Laughter]. Anyway, he turns off his hearing aid, Helen says Jack do you want a cup of coffee? That will be fine. When she leaves he turns them back on and we talk again. Thirty or forty minutes later Helen comes in to see how we're doing. And I thought I wish I had a camera on this. Anyway, it was, the whole day really went well, and I had never met him. I'd seen General LeMay. When I was with the Cuban crisis he came down and [inaudible]. But a very interesting guy. As the day went on he just kept feeding me a little more, a little more. I had a pad of paper. I was jotting things down. Towards the end of the day I thought I have a business opportunity for you, general. He stared at me for what seemed like a very long time, and I said I want to hire you as my special assistant and I'm not going to pay you, and you have to come when I tell you to. He said that sounds like a fair deal. I said get your calendar. He got his calendar. I said next week, which day do you want to come? I'm flying you in next week to SAC headquarters. You've got to see what's going on, they've got to see you. I'm the dolt that just took over the command. I want them to see you being part of what we're going to be doing. So he flew in, we paraded him around, gave him all the briefings and what have you, and then flew him back. I said we're going to do that every two to three months. I want SAC to know that you're involved. It was just great.

Then a bit later, as you probably -- We brought LeMay back and we brought Helen with him. Had a party for them each time that they came. The second time that they came Helen called my wife up to the podium. It was a black tie dinner. Got out there, and she reached under the podium and came out with 12 crystal glasses. She said, there have been two generals worth a damn in the United States Strategic Air Command. My husband and Jack Chain. We got these glasses when we were here. Judy and Jack are here now. I want Judy to have them. Everybody was clapping. Gee whiz, what's that all about?

Anyway, we really had a good [inaudible]. Then I was sending General LeMay every couple of months to a different base. I wanted him to be seen and for him to learn and be able to [inaudible]. It was just wonderful to see him out with the troops. He was an icon. Everybody loved him.

Everybody loved him, but most of them had never met him, never even seen him. But they all knew LeMay. Thank you for the question.

Question: Sir, Colonel Bohannon from 2nd Bomb Wing. I just want to say thanks for being here today.

As you look back on your career, you served as CINCSAC during a very key time in our nation's history. I'm curious, though, during your five years there what you learned about the Soviets that perhaps may translate to what we now face, obviously with Crimea and the crisis in Ukraine. Russia has again in many ways taken center stage. What can we learn from you? What can you relate to us based on your experience?

General (Ret) Chain: The point I'm going to make is I left there 23 years ago. I don't have access to classified information. I just know what you guys know reading in the newspaper, and I couldn't honestly answer your question. I read the papers every day, but I don't have Top Secret background information. I don't know what's going to work out. I hope we've got people like you who have classified information, get the briefings regularly, what have you, and so you have a position that has come through knowledge. I don't have the knowledge. And for me to fake it isn't right and it's not fair to you. I just don't have the information. That as 23 years ago when I had my last briefing.

Anybody else?

If not, thank you very much.

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